

3RRR

Triple R Broadcasters

Submission

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Communications, Information Technology & the Arts**



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Executive Summary

1.0 Triple R: A Brief History

3RRR was established under an experimental licence in May 1976, commenced broadcasting in November 1976 and was granted a permanent 'E' (educational) licence in August 1978. Triple R Broadcasters Ltd is a non-profit company structure with a Board of representatives from RMIT, The University of Melbourne and Triple R.

The station has recently relocated to purpose built premises in Brunswick purchased with the support of the Melbourne community following a 2 year fundraising campaign.

2.0 3RRR: An Operational Overview

Triple R operates a community radio service to the Melbourne metropolitan area with a focus on music, arts, education, information and cultural issues and events in the Melbourne community. The station broadcasts live 24 hours each day with a core full-time and part-time staff of 15 and over 200 voluntary broadcasters, and is self-funded primarily through listener subscriptions and on-air sponsorship.

Triple R has a current subscriber base of 11,000.

3.0 The Triple R Audience

Triple R's audience is identified as culturally active and socially aware with high levels of tertiary education. It's defined more through a set of social and cultural values rather than a more standard approach to demographics.

The 2005 McNair Ingenuity survey identified that 10.37% of Melbourne's 10+ population tune in to Triple R representing 322,000 listeners. Age demographics are 20% aged 18 – 24, 45% aged 25 – 34 and 24% aged 40 – 54.

4.0 Programming & Content

Triple R's idiosyncratic, irreverent and somewhat larrikin broadcasting style started early and holds strong in 2006, as does its commitment to meaningful, informative cultural comment and discussion. 65 individual programs operate within a broad talks and music format ranging from arts, science and architecture through to all genres of contemporary music.

5.0 Technological Developments

Triple R receives an average of 600,000 hits on the website per month, has been live audio streaming since 2001 and commenced podcasting with 3 talks programs. The station is keen to develop digital content for cross-platform delivery but has limited resources for the development of new content.

6.0 Future Opportunities & Threats

Triple R has strong future development opportunities as an independent producer of creative cultural content. Funding support is required for both the development of digital content and the transition to digital transmission.



1.0 Triple R: A Brief History

The station began as 3RMT in May 1976 based on the campus of RMIT, Melbourne. In November 1976, 3RMT commenced broadcasting under an experimental license transmitting on 102.7 MHz. This was one of the first groups of licenses introducing public broadcasting in Australia (now known as community broadcasting). In August 1978, after federal legislation was passed introducing permanent licenses, an 'E' (educational) class public broadcasting licence was awarded to Triple R Broadcasters Ltd. under the call sign 3RRR. Triple R Broadcasters, a non-profit company structure, originally operated as a consortium of 8 educational institutions and since the mid 80's has operated with a Board of representatives from RMIT, The University of Melbourne, and Triple R.

The station's interpretation of educational content with a small 'e' and focus on popular culture was reflected very early in its history. A 1977 policy document prepared by the first Station Manager, Sue Mathews, stated that:

'We have no alternative but to experiment – we have no precedents and our brief is to be innovative. 3RMT-FM is not licensed to be a commercial nor a government station, not a school resource nor an Open University, not simply a vehicle for the training of students nor for indiscriminate public access. The radio station of RMIT should contribute to the creation of a lively and stimulating total learning environment.' (from *Radio City: The First 30 Years of RRR* by Mark Phillips)

From its early days Triple R defined itself through concepts of independence, innovation, 'alternative' opinions, and a commitment to reflecting Australian and especially Melbourne's cultural environment in both its music and talks programming. Many people have developed their initial skills in broadcasting and media via training and experience at Triple R and have gone on to work in the national and commercial broadcasting sectors or other areas of the media and cultural industries. A range of Triple R programs have moved into commercial radio such as Danger Lowbrow (FOX), Lawyers Guns and Money (3AW), and Coodabeen Champions (3LO & 3AW) and many media personalities such as Ross Stevenson, Fran Kelly, Terry Lane, Santo Cilauro, Margot O'Neil, Trevor Marmalade, Dave O'Neil, Kate Langbroek and Greg Pickhaver (HG Nelson) started on 3RRR.

Having commenced on the campus of RMIT the station moved briefly to a terrace house in Carlton in the late 70's and then into a warehouse space in Fitzroy in 1981. In 2003 Triple R was advised that lease renewal would not be available on its Fitzroy premises. It commenced a fundraising campaign, Move Your RRR's, and with the generous support of the Melbourne community purchased a building in Brunswick which it relocated to at the beginning of 2005. The new Triple R premises house a more extensive studio complex, extended training facilities and a live performance space that is still under construction. These facilities will allow the station to retain its commitment to development and training, and supporting Melbourne's vibrant music, arts and cultural communities.

In 2006 Triple R will celebrate its 30th anniversary with a series of events in November including the official opening of the Brunswick premises and the publication of *Radio City: The First 30 Years of RRR*, a history of the station being written by journalist Mark Phillips.

In an extract from the draft manuscript of the book Mark discusses the late 70's period:

A bundle of energy, Pickhaver also organised the early Triple R benefit concerts. Some 2200 people crammed into the second annual concert, the Royal Show of Rock, across six venues – four featuring music and two with images - in Melbourne Uni's Union building on August 12, 1979, raising \$6000 for the station. The line up included Jo Jo Zep, Midnight Oil, Sneakers, Secret Policy, Dutch Tilders, Tch Tch Tch and the Jane Clifton Sextet.

Pickhaver was the lynchpin behind the station's live broadcasts of Melbourne's two iconic sporting events, the VFL Grand Final and the Melbourne Cup. Mathews believes the first Grand Final broadcast was aired in 1978, with Pickhaver, and comedians John Clarke (then at the height of his Fred Dagg character) and Rod Quantock. Pickhaver also hosted the station's 1980 Melbourne Cup broadcast, which showcased Triple R's irreverent approach to a serious subject. No-one knew it at the time, but Pickhaver was also pioneering a satirical form of commentary over the top of a television sports broadcast with the sound turned down that he would later refine as H.G. Nelson alongside John Doyle's Rampaging Roy Slaven.

Pickhaver typified the crossover between Melbourne's late-70s alternative subculture – centred around Carlton and Fitzroy, and to a lesser extent, St Kilda and Prahran – and Triple R. At the centre of the inner-urban culture had been the Pram Factory co-operative out of which had emerged the likes of David Williamson, Max Gillies, Graham Blundell, the Skyhooks, Pickhaver and others. Triple R was fast outgrowing its student origins, and was nurturing the culture of music, theatre, and film that was to blossom in the following decades.

(Draft - Radio City: The First 30 Years of RRR by Mark Phillips)

The Triple R mission statement is:

To educate, inform and entertain by drawing upon appropriate community resources; to develop a critical approach to contemporary culture.



2.0 3RRR: An Operational Overview

Triple R operates a community radio service to the Melbourne metropolitan area with a focus on music, arts, education, information and cultural activities and events in the Melbourne community. The station functions with a core full-time and part-time staff of 15 and over 200 volunteer broadcasters producing and presenting approximately 65 programs each week, and broadcasts live 24 hours a day.

The station is self-funding through sponsorship (primarily on-air promotions) and listener subscriptions with an annual contribution from RMIT and The University of Melbourne, which represents approximately 4% of the yearly operating budget. Over the last decade the station has established a secure, stable and financially viable independent operation. In the 2004 / 2005 financial year the station had a turnover of \$1.4m boosted by additional fundraising related to the relocation to Brunswick.

The areas of sponsorship and listener subscription support have been developed with a consistent approach over a long period. Sponsorship income is primarily derived from music, entertainment, the arts & cultural industries and the small local business area. The station maintains very clear boundaries of editorial independence with 3 staff positions dedicated to the sponsorship & promotions area. Most sponsorship income is based on a large turnover of small promotional campaigns averaging 20 spots on-air. Triple R offers lower sponsorship rates to small arts & cultural organisations and independent bands and artists.

The station also operates an extensive free community service area in campaigns and promotions for not-for-profit organisations in the areas of health, social justice, public awareness, community-based activities and issues and events in the public interest that are free of charge. This ranges from public seminars in health and welfare issues to a broad range of fundraising events in social justice areas such as homelessness, domestic violence, charities and refugees to public education, rallies or free cultural events.

Listener subscriptions have been slowly building in volume throughout the station's history and each year the Triple R conducts a major radiothon subscription campaign in August. **The station currently has a subscription base of 11,000** and a new lifetime subscription category that was introduced over the last 2 years as part of additional fundraising for Triple R's relocation. The annual radiothon is also utilised as a major promotional campaign for the station with themes such as Declare Your Independence, Show us your Love, Cash for Content, and Kick it to RRR's. Each year over 150 additional volunteers assist with the campaign by answering phones and providing office assistance the following month during the 'pay-up' period.

In addition to the broadcasting area, a large number of volunteers are also involved in the day to day operation of the station in the general office, production, events, and special projects. The station also operates regular student placements and secondary student work experience. Station volunteers and broadcasters range in age from mid teens to mid fifties and are drawn to the station through their engagement as listeners, students, members of other community groups or the arts and cultural community and share a commitment to the concept of independent community-based broadcasting.



3.0 The Triple R Audience

Triple R's audience is identified as culturally active and socially aware with high levels of tertiary education. It's defined more through a set of social and cultural values rather than a more standard approach to demographics.

The station has maintained regular audience research over the last decade including in-house subscriber surveys, Roy Morgan Research, a local Melbourne research company Media Mark, and more recently McNair Ingenuity.

There is regular communication with the listening audience through various feedback mechanisms and the station focuses on effectively servicing its subscribers. A subscriber magazine 'The Trip' is produced 3 times per year and direct mailed to subscribers. All on-air give-aways are only made available to current subscribers and Triple R events and merchandise are discounted to Triple R subscribers. Subscribers are encouraged to maintain regular contact with the station in person or through email and phone contact. This enables the station to accurately assess subscriber responses to programming, station events, and tolerance of both the type of sponsorship run on the station and the sound of sponsorship announcements. These areas and feedback from subscribers are constantly monitored and though informal provide a very effective way of measuring subscriber response to the content of the station. Subscribers are very sensitive to sponsorship sounding too commercial and the station declines sponsorship that it believes would not be well supported by subscribers who contribute financially to the station to maintain its independence. The average subscriber age is 28 which has been remarkably consistent throughout the station's history – in 1981 the average subscriber age was 27.

The 2005 McNair Ingenuity survey identified that 10.37% of Melbourne's 10+ population tune in to Triple R representing 322,000 listeners.

The station averages 600,000 hits per month on the Triple R web site with a monthly audio streaming audience of 37,000 of which 45% originates overseas.

Audience characteristics:

- 20% aged 18 –24,
- 45% aged 25 – 34
- 24% aged 40 - 54
- 20% currently studying
- 51% have completed tertiary education
- 75% work full-time or part-time
- 61% work full-time
- 49% earn over \$40,000 pa
- 32% in professional or executive employment
- 25% in managerial or administrative roles
- 16% skilled tradesman

Triple R's audience is very loyal, closely engaged with the station and responsive to the stations content. Listeners are very supportive of station outside broadcasts, events, sponsor discounters, and fundraising projects such as the Community Cup annual football match where a combined 3RRR / 3PBS team plays a Melbourne muso's team and last year raised \$160,000 for St Kilda's Sacred Heart Mission.



4.0 Programming & Content

Triple R's idiosyncratic, irreverent and somewhat larrikin broadcasting style started early and holds strong in 2006, as does its commitment to meaningful, informative cultural comment and discussion.

The station operates a broad programming format with approximately 65 individual shows all presented by voluntary broadcasters and breakfast presenters on part-time salaries. Triple R's program grid is essentially a mixture of strip and block programming with a 3 hour breakfast show across weekdays with music, lots of conversation and guests, followed by a morning magazine approach with individual focus programs across the 5 days and specialist programming between 12 – 4pm. The music drive shows run in a 4pm – 7pm strip of individual shows followed by an early evening talks slot 7pm – 8pm and evening specialist shows from 7pm – 2am. The graveyard shift from 2am – 6am is presented live across the week with a large roster of presenters and used as a training ground for broadcast development. The weekends operate a little differently being a mixture of talks and music specialist block programs.

Triple R content includes a range of talks programming with the 9am – 12 morning shows focusing on different issues across the week – Monday's Long Grass Sessions presents community issues, natural health, indigenous issues and sustainability and conservation. Tuesday's The Word focuses more on local and international current affairs with a bit of football and cooking, Wednesday's Midweek Crisis covers a broad range of topics including astrology, food, building, gardening, pet care, finance, workplace and legal issues. On Thursday's SmartArts covers a broad spectrum of arts as the name suggests and Friday is a uniquely Triple R approach to talk back radio as Tony Biggs 'talks with' Triple R listeners. Evening and weekends specialist talks programs range from IT & computers to science, medical issues, food, coastal issues and conservation, film, literature, science fiction and arts to architecture and comedy. There are a number of long-term specialist arts & cultural programs including Sitelines, Aural Text, SmartArts, and Film Buff's Forecast.

In the music area Triple R presents a 3 hour music drive slot across weekdays 4pm – 7pm with a very broad range of music. Everything from 21 year old Woody McDonald's Wig-Wam Bam on Monday's with an eclectic range of new and old contemporary music to Wednesday's Incoming solely focused on local and Australian music to Stephen Walker's Skull Cave on Friday that he's been presenting for over 20 years. Specialist music shows run the gamut of all forms of contemporary music with 5 specialist Australian music shows and everything from folk, metal, blues, hip hop, reggae, country, beats, funk, jazz, electronic and rock.

RMIT Media & Communications students present a program every Monday 'Room with a View' which is co-ordinated at RMIT with 2nd & 3rd year students and RMIT journalism students also deliver a midday news service each semester.

The station maintains a mixture of very long-term presenters with people such as Stephen Walker, Max Crowdaddy, Karen Leng, Gary Young, Johnny Topper, Denise Hylands, Rick E Vengeance, Brian Wise, Neil Rogers & Bruce Berryman that have all



been broadcasting on Triple R close to 20 years or more, with a combination of new programs and young presenters that are introduced to the program grid each year.

Triple R has also presented live broadcasts regularly since its early broadcasts live from RMIT with bands such The Sports, Essendon Airport and The Birthday Party through to broadcasts on the rooftop of the Fitzroy premises over the last two decades with a broad range of local and overseas bands. Music shows also regularly feature bands live in the studio with acoustic versions of their material. As well as live band broadcasts the station also regular holds outside program broadcasts with the breakfast program, Film Buffs live broadcasts each year as part of the Melbourne Film Festival, arts broadcasts from venues such as the ACMI launching the Kubrick exhibition or the National Gallery exhibitions, Einstein A Go-Go with science broadcasts from the Melbourne Museum and live broadcasts as part of the launch of a range of cultural festivals such as the Melbourne Fringe.

The station is passionately committed to a completed non-playlisted format and all broadcasters and programs are fully autonomous in the selection of material for their programs in both the music and talks areas. The station provides staff producers to support interview arrangements and production support and training and the Program Manager position is a central resource for shows in maintaining broadcast standards.

Triple R operates with a Program Advisory Group that is convened by the Program Manager and includes broadcaster, volunteer and Board representatives as well as the Station Manager. Program reviews are conducted 3 times per year and any program changes or training and development required by broadcasters in either content or presentation is implemented by the Program Manager role. In line with Community Radio's *Codes of Practice* the station implements program policies which oppose and attempt to break down prejudice on the basis of race, sex, nationality, religion, disability, ethnic background, age or sexual preference.

As a broadcaster, Triple R provides a valuable community service to the wider Melbourne community. It encourages access and involvement from the community and encourages participation by a broad range of volunteers and presents a range of entertainment, comment, cultural discussion and opinion which provides alternative views to the mainstream media.

Triple R has made a significant contribution to the cultural fabric of Melbourne and provided long-term support to emerging and established local and Australian musicians and artists over the past 30 years. The station has achieved a strong national and international reputation for its commitment to contemporary music and Australian artists throughout its history. Triple R has established itself as a site that contributes social and cultural capital to the Melbourne and Australian community and is made possible and maintained by the large numbers of volunteer broadcasters involved in the service and the support of our listeners for such a service to exist.

A copy of the current Triple R program guide is attached.



5.0 Technological Developments

Over the last 2 years Triple R has been pre-occupied with relocating premises and re-establishing basic broadcast, production and training facilities. The new facilities in Brunswick have been planned to incorporate all elements of Triple R's operation but also to allow for future developments in audio production and live broadcasting in the multi-functional live performance space.

The station commenced live audio streaming from the RRR website in 2001 and has developed a slowly growing international audience as well as the live streaming being used at higher than expected levels by Melbournian's at work and home which appears to have increased daytime audience listening patterns.

Three programs are currently also podcasting – Byte Into It, The Spin, and Film Buff's Forecast. Many other talks programs are keen to commence podcasting over the next 12 months and a number of local music programs are also keen to develop in this area but currently inhibited by a lack of music copyright arrangements for new media production.

There is a rapidly increasing level of requests for audio on demand access to Triple R content as new technologies change listening patterns and consumers develop different media usage patterns other than 'real time' delivery of services.

Triple R is keen to develop a range of cross-platform digital audio content for both exiting Triple R programs and to extend facilities and opportunities to increase volunteer involvement in innovative program creation and production. The station is in a unique position, as are many other community radio stations, to contribute to new content development and has extensive experience in a creative approach to audio content and programs. Planning and construction at the new premises includes extension of studio production facilities and training / project work space for the development of new media and content.

At this stage the station resources must be directed to basic infrastructure in the new premises which has required considerable additional fundraising so the opportunity to develop the production facilities required for new digital content development is extremely limited. This will remain the case over the next couple years and is frustrating to both the stations audience who carry changed expectations of access to content and station volunteers who are keen to contribute ideas and energy to digital content production. This is a common issue in the community broadcasting sector – there are the ideas, energy and commitment to create fresh digital content but the majority of stations are struggling to maintain existing broadcast operations and costs so are unable to extend the facilities to support that content creation.

There is pressing need to a improved understanding of how to support the community broadcasting sector and stations such as Triple R to keep up with the pace of technological change and harness the experience and creative resources of broadcasters towards cross-platform content delivery.

6.0 Future Opportunities & Threats

The key opportunities for Triple R pivot around the station's role as an independent producer of creative cultural content. It is now very well established as a Melbourne radio station and the new Brunswick premises provide the station with a stable long-term environment to operate from, and at the same time will extend studio, live performance and training facilities for the future. While the station will continue to focus on the production of radio content and its role as a community broadcaster within the Melbourne community, it will also need to develop multiple approaches to content delivery across a range of technological platforms as cultural shifts occur.

The multiplicity of digital devices, and the associated changes they create in the community's patterns of accessing content, represent both opportunities and threats to traditional media forms such as radio. There is a much larger demand now occurring for audio on demand that necessitates the generation of content in multiple forms and creates opportunities for new content to be developed. Triple R has been audio streaming for a number of years, has begun to reformat talks programs into podcast form, and provides some archival website material.

While the station is keen to explore new forms of content delivery and also develop new digital content it is difficult to increase self-funded revenue strategies to allow for these new developments. It requires an extension of audio production facilities, volunteer facilities, computers, and facilities management in order to keep pace with the range of new delivery opportunities. The ideas and experience for content creation is well developed within Triple R but the extension of resources beyond what we already self-fund to do is the more challenging issue.

There is much discussion about new content development in relation to digital media and additional funding support is required to utilise the skills and experience in content creation that Triple R has accumulated.

Community broadcasting services and programs play a more specialist role within the larger populated metropolitan areas. The licensing of the 12 early educational stations and their evolution, combined with other areas of the sector and newer stations such as SYN, Edge and Fbi, has created an interesting network of stations. These stations have developed an extensive network of creative cultural production within their communities that contributes to sector diversity but is often under-recognised within the more traditional interpretations of 'diversity' within the sector. There needs to be a greater attention to cultural content production and the role of independent producers both within the community broadcasting sector and by external funding bodies in the communications and arts areas.

The transition to digital transmission represents a major financial issue for Triple R as it would for the vast majority of community broadcasting stations. Over the last 2 or 3 years the station has maximised its fundraising strategies to achieve relocation and construction of new facilities and as a consequence will be in a very limited position to deal with digital transmission. If a long-term robust community broadcasting sector is to be maintained as the third tier of Australian broadcasting it is absolutely essential that funding support for digital transmission be provided to the community sector.

While both digital content development and planning for digital transmission has been accepted by the federal government in national broadcasting systems budgets for some time now, the community sector has not been given any specific funding commitments in these areas and both are essential to Triple R's future development.